

Letter in opposition to Crossgates Expansion/Rapp Road/Costco Project

1 message

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Introductory comments:

The various proposals related to SEQR violations. Crossgates expansion, Rapp Road Apartments, Costco and Costco's proposed Gas Stations with 16-18 gas pumps and a new Crossgates CDTA BRT Rapid Transit Terminal are too controversial and impactful to be discussed and resolved through a remote public hearing that will not satisfy the spirit of if not the Open Meetings Law standards expected by the residents of Guilderland in general until the disruptions related to the COVID 19 crisis are manageable, and it is clear that the Pyramid Management Group, Crossgates itself to survive being transferred to a special servicer for "Imminent default."

(Crossgates Mall in Guilderland and two other Pyramid properties, Poughkeepsie Galleria and Palisades Center in West Nyack, are part of separate commercial-mortgage backed securities that were transferred to a special servicer for "imminent default," according to Kroll Bond Rating Agency..)

J.C. Penny's is rumored to declare bankruptcy and close many if not all its stores within the near future. Other Crossgates tenants may follow. Closure on Crossgates issues should be postponed.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed development by Pyramid (Crossgates) on Rapp Road, the Mall Road and Western Avenue to build up to 360 Apartments with up to 3 five-story apartment buildings, up to 50,000 sq ft of office space and up to 278,900 sq ft commercial expansive retail including including a Costco with a 700 car parking lot and a 16-18 pump gas station should be rejected because the following are not adequately addressed:

1. The quality of life in Guilderland is changing drastically with the explosion of growth that is occurring. The previous building of the hotel and now this expansion of Crossgates Mall on over 46 additional acres with multiple high-rise apartment buildings, office buildings and a proposed big-box retail Costco is creating a very dense city/urban area that will directly impact neighborhoods that should remain suburban. The Transit Oriented District is supposed to "incentivize development that adequately protects nearby residential neighborhoods" according to the stated purpose in section § 280-18.19(a) of the Town Zoning Code. This development does not meet that standard. The Town appears to be losing control of a vaguely developed concept.

2. The proposed expansion by Pyramid to build a huge Costco big-box store with 18 gas pumps also does not fit the stated purpose of the Transit Oriented District and gas stations should never be built over known aquifers and environmentally sensitive areas. The traffic to and from the gas pumps, like the traffic to and from the car wash will aggravate traffic on route 20 and the ring road.

3. The Capital District Transportation Committee was a major sponsor of the Westmere Corridor Study. CDTA is planning an expansion of the BusPlus BRT

system (Purple Line) to include a route connecting Crossgates, Crossgates Commons, SUNYA and downtown Albany. The bus stop and waiting area at Crossgates Mall – one of the busiest stops for the Capital District Transportation Authority – will be relocated to accommodate a future bus rapid transit line to connect Crossgates Mall, Crossgates Commons, SUNYA/Harriman State Office Campuses and downtown Albany.



This intense development will not help the traffic in this part of Guilderland. To increase the development on these roads and expect traffic to go down, especially on Western Avenue, is magical thinking.

From just 2 of the 3 sites, the DEIS traffic study predicts 364 new trips during the weekday AM peak, 662 new trips during the weekday PM peak and 911 new trips during that Saturday peak.

The traffic congestion on Western Avenue is already horrible and dangerous. More traffic will only make it more difficult to patronize local businesses. It is almost impossible to make left-hand turns from either direction in a safe manner. With the addition of a regional attraction like Costco, the amount of non-local traffic will skyrocket leading to an increased probability of more accidents that will further stress Guilderland's first responders. This will only get worse around the holidays in the winter.

4. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is woefully incomplete because it does not adequately address the effect this massive development would have on the ecosystem of the Pine Bush, or the effect on plant and animal species.

The Pine Bush borders the Crossgates expansion. The Albany Pine Bush is considered the best example of an inland pine barrens ecosystem in the world. The Pine Bush contains 78 wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including the federal and state-endangered Karner blue butterfly) and state-threatened frosted elfin butterfly, and the largest inland sand dune system in eastern North America. The site has been designated a National Natural Landmark, a National Heritage Area Site, an NYS Bird Conservation Area and a

National Audubon Society Important Bird Area. Appendices F and G in the DEIS is inadequate to evaluate the impact of the proposed development on the plant and animal species in the Pine Bush

The Pine Bush habitat is threatened by the expansion of this commercial venture, whether it is adjacent to the construction or a few hundred feet away. These species are important not only to the Pine Bush, but to the local ecosystem as well. The cumulative impact of this development plus other proposals on the Pine Bush is not adequately addressed.

The world is experiencing the sixth major extinction. The mitigation measures offered in the DEIS are inadequate to address the destruction of 46 acres of land. The proposed development decreases the size of the Pine Bush and the mitigation measures offer no possibility for expanding the habitat

5. We do not need to encourage more potential issues in this area with high-density housing and commercial retail. There are several small residential neighborhoods that will be directly affected and overwhelmed by this surge in density. Traffic and home values being the most obvious impacts that will be detrimental to the homeowners and other residents in this area. We need to preserve and protect the way of life that this suburban area has offered to the current residents of this town and which attracts others to move here.

6. At the very least, the Town of Guilderland Planning Board should postpone making any decisions regarding the DEIS until all pending lawsuits against the Town of Guilderland and The Pyramid Companies regarding the status of the Planning Board remaining Lead Agency are resolved.

7. I reiterate that neighboring towns are so disturbed about their experiences with the inadequacy of remote Public Hearing not meeting their understanding of the Open Meeting Law requirements that some may choose to sue to require controversial open meetings be postponed. Due to "Pause", required by the Governor or the resolution of the COVID 19 "era" impact on the ability of the applicants to even proceed if approved, Guilderland should postpone making controversial decisions until the town is confident the financial status' of the applicant and Crossgates tenants are sound. News reports indicate that the Pyramid Management Group is considering filing bankruptcy. The Town of Guilderland should not allow projects to begin that have a high likelihood of not being completed.